

Statement of Representative Scott Tipton (CO-03)  
before the House Committee on Natural Resources

Members' Day Hearing

June 4, 2019

Chairman Grijalva, Ranking Republican Bishop, and distinguished Committee Members, thank you for allowing me to offer testimony before your Committee today.

I am appearing before the Committee today to request timely consideration of three bills that are important to the constituents of my district.

I would first like to ask for the Committee's consideration of H.R. 1225, the Restore Our Parks and Public Lands Act sponsored by Ranking Member Bishop. The Department of the Interior's total deferred maintenance backlog currently stands at \$16 billion, including a staggering \$11.6 billion backlog within our National Park System. My district features seven remarkable units of the National Park System, including Mesa Verde National Park and Great Sand Dunes National Park & Preserve. Each have significant maintenance needs. Park units in my district account for more than \$157 million in deferred maintenance out of a Colorado total of roughly \$247 million. These sites are American treasures. The longer we wait to make needed repairs, the costlier the repairs become.

Rural economies in districts like mine depend on National Park and other public land visitation. If trails, roads, campgrounds, and other facilities are continually closed due to repairs, tourism is harmed. Hotels, restaurants, and other vendors rely on functioning parks for revenue. If the public hears that popular roads or trails are closed, they will look to vacation elsewhere. I hope this Committee will soon move H.R. 1225 to

a markup. This is a wonderful bipartisan opportunity to fix our parks and other public lands.

Another bill that would address backlogs on public lands is a bill that I have introduced – H.R. 2509, the bipartisan Ski Area Retention Act. This bill is specifically related to permitting backlogs. The bill would help support recreation improvements on ski areas by establishing a fund within the Forest Service to help support permitting of recreation improvements. Currently, there are 122 ski areas nationwide that sit on public lands generating approximately \$37 million in permit fees. These fees are sent to the Treasury, where they end up in a black hole for redistribution during the annual appropriations process. Ski areas rely on funds from the Forest Service Recreation Program for improvement projects but staffing shortages and underfunding causes severe permitting delays and provides a disincentive for private investment. The Ski Area Fee Retention Act would allow the Forest Service to retain a portion of the ski area fees within the National Forest on which they were generated to support permit administration. Forests with ski areas generating more than \$15 million a year would be allowed to retain 50% of the fees, while forests that generate less than \$15 million would retain 65% of the fees. The bill also includes a provision that would allow the retained fees to support permitting for other recreation users once all of the ski area permitting needs are satisfied.

Finally, I would like to highlight H.R. 1492, the Yucca House National Monument Boundary Revision Act. This bill would further protect archaeological sites of the Ancestral Pueblo by allowing the National Park Service to modify the boundary of the Yucca House National Monument in Southwest Colorado, expanding the monument by 160 acres. The Yucca House National Monument was established in 1919 by President Woodrow Wilson following an initial donation of 9.6 acres. The monument was further expanded by approximately 24 acres in 1996. Today, a private landowner is seeking to donate 160 acres of

land adjacent to the National Monument to further protect archaeological sites and cultural resources and enhance access to the monument. The land has been studied and determined to be appropriate for inclusion in the National Monument. Now, the donation must be facilitated through an Act of Congress. The Yucca House National Monument is one of the most significant archaeological sites in the country and stands as a reminder of how the ancient Pueblo used to live hundreds of years ago. One-hundred years after it was first granted national protection, I think it is the perfect time for this committee consider legislation to further expand Yucca House National Monument.

I thank the Committee for holding this valuable hearing to allow for Members off the Committee to share their priorities and I am happy to answer any questions you may have.